

Training and development opportunities for medical writers from different regions across the world

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Abstract

In the dynamic and rapidly evolving field of medical writing, continuous learning and professional development are crucial for success. Medical writers play a vital role in translating complex scientific and medical information into clear, accurate, and engaging content for various audiences, including healthcare professionals, regulatory bodies, and the general public. To excel in this demanding profession, medical writers must stay updated with the latest advancements, writing techniques, and industry best practices. Fortunately, there are many training and development opportunities available worldwide tailored specifically for medical writers. This article delves into the various training possibilities available globally, from short courses to education programmes and from certification courses to workshops, conferences and online resources, providing a useful guide for medical writers eager to enhance their skills and advance their careers.

The field of medical writing demands a skilled workforce equipped with the latest knowledge and techniques. But you don't go to university and get a degree in medical writing. Many medical writers have transitioned to their field from other areas – from clinical medicine to general communications, marketing, and more. Medical writers enter the field with transferable skills that need to be refined to meet the specific requirements of the medical writing profession.

So how do experienced medical writers advance their skills and how do beginners transition to the field?

Over the past couple of decades, a diverse array of niche medical writing training and development opportunities has emerged globally. Many of these opportunities are available online, making it easy for medical writers, wherever they're located, to stay updated with their profession. This article provides a small sample of the broader range of training options available to medical writers. This list is not exhaustive and may not encompass all possibilities. The reader is encouraged to seek additional information and resources to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

How to choose the right training and development opportunities

Before you explore training and development opportunities in medical writing, it's important to consider your goals and skill gaps.

- **Start with your career goal** – Where do you want to be in 6 or 12 months' time? Define your goal, then plan the necessary steps needed to achieve it.
- **Do you want to be a freelance writer or an employed writer?** – There are different options based on your objective, so decide whether you'll start a medical writing business or apply for permanent roles instead.
- **Identify your skill gaps** – Determine any missing skills based on your career goal. For instance, you might possess strong writing

abilities but lack the knowledge to establish a freelance business. Alternatively, you may excel in academic writing but have no experience in consumer health writing. You could be new to artificial intelligence or need to enhance your freelance business skills.

- **Network with others who are where you want to be** – Connect with medical writers who are already succeeding in the industry for insights into their career paths and the steps they took.

Once you have an idea of what you are hoping to achieve through training, in alignment with your goals, you can identify suitable training and development opportunities.

Formal education

Let's start at the beginning: university education. Many medical writers wonder if they need some type of degree to be a medical writer – and, if so, should it be a writing degree or a medical writing/scientific degree?

While not always a prerequisite, advanced degrees in scientific disciplines or health-related fields can provide a strong foundation for medical writers.

Certain types of scientific medical writing jobs require candidates to have advanced degrees, and this is always listed in the job descriptions. But is it worth doing a PhD to become a medical writer?

In some contexts, a PhD can be valuable for a career in medical writing, particularly if you aim to

specialise in complex or research-intensive areas. It enhances credibility and expertise, but many successful medical writers worldwide have relevant experience, strong writing skills, and highly successful careers without a PhD.

While no universities offer specific degrees in medical writing (yet), many universities in regions such as North America, Europe, and Asia offer specialised programmes or post-graduate



courses in medical writing, biomedical communication, or science journalism. These courses can teach you valuable writing skills and industry best practices.

Professional certifications and associations

Participation in well-established medical writing associations enhances professional development.

Engaging with recognised associations ensures access to high-quality resources and a supportive network, thereby enhancing both learning experiences and professional growth.

Industry-recognised certifications, such as those offered by the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) or the European Medical Writers Association (EMWA), validate expertise and enhance career prospects. Regardless of your career stage, certifications from reputable organisations look good on your CV and teach valuable skills. Here are some examples:

- **American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)** – AMWA offers the Medical Writer Certified credential and a variety of online and in-person courses, covering diverse aspects of medical writing.

Workshops, conferences, and webinars are critical for hands-on learning and networking.

- **European Medical Writers Association (EMWA)** – EMWA provides workshops, webinars, and the EMWA Professional Development Programme to support continuous learning.
- **Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society (RAPS)** – RAPS provides courses on regulatory medical writing as part of their professional development offerings.

Workshops, conferences, and webinars

Workshops, conferences, and webinars are critical for hands-on learning and networking.

Attending relevant medical writing and industry events exposes you to new ideas from professionals working in the field. Workshops are excellent education tools, as they allow you to bounce ideas around with your medical writing peers and get feedback on your writing. Here are some options:

- **AMWA and EMWA conferences** – These events feature sessions on various aspects of medical writing, professional development workshops, and networking opportunities.
- **Drug Information Association (DIA) Conferences** – DIA conferences include

sessions on regulatory writing and medical communications that cater to professionals in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology sectors.

- **Specialty conferences** – These include health topic conferences, health literacy-themed events, and SEO conferences.

Online medical writing courses

Online training provides the biggest and best opportunities for medical writing education worldwide.

The main benefit is that online courses are easy to access for anyone, anywhere. Medical writing courses cover various topics, including career development, skill enhancement, and freelance medical writing.

Through an online course, you can connect with niche experts around the world from the comfort of your own home, and online learning can be relatively cost effective. You can take courses as soon as you are ready and start upskilling today. You can also get individual feedback on your writing which is incredibly valuable for any writer.

It's important to be aware that online training catering to medical writers globally can sometimes be generic and can't always account for region-specific regulatory requirements.

While medical writing as a skillset is

essentially the same around the world, and many medical writers work for global clients, there are country-specific rules and regulations to be aware of for certain types of medical writing roles. For example, if you're working as a medical writer in Australia, you need to be familiar with the Therapeutic Goods Administration, which has specific regulations for marketing health products. These rules may differ from those in other countries. That's where taking a programme in your location from a local expert can be helpful.

If you're considering an online medical writing course, look for an option with a global base where you can connect with other students in your local area.

There are many excellent online courses available. However, some courses may lack substantial backing or credible experience, resulting in offerings that can sometimes provide less effective training and may not be a worthwhile investment.

Here are some reputable options:

- **Health Writer Hub:** Offers online courses in health writing and freelance writing (<https://www.healthwriterhub.com/>).
- **Emma Hitt:** Provides online courses in medical writing
- **Sarah Nelson:** Offers coaching for medical writers
- **CME Pro:** Specialises in continuing medical education resources
- **Medcomms Networking:** A platform for networking and resources in medical communications.

Online courses about related topics

In addition to online medical writing courses, online courses about more general topics can help medical writers upskill and stay updated with important industry topics.

Thinking about different areas, you can study topics in therapeutic areas or specific skills. For example:

- **Health topics, therapeutic areas, and medications** – If you have a special interest in a topic like neuroscience, taking a course can help you update your knowledge.
- **Health literacy and patient education** – If you are interested in learning more about behaviour change and health literacy, you can attend training seminars and follow new research in these areas.
- **General writing courses, including copywriting and technical writing** – Though these courses may not be aimed at medical

writers specifically, they are excellent for writing skill development

- **Technical skills, such as SEO and AI** – Many clients and employers value medical writers with a broad range of expertise in new technologies. Certifications in these areas are a significant selling point.
- **Project management** – An essential skill for new and experienced medical writers alike
- **Freelance writing, including business management and marketing** – If you want to become a freelance medical writer, taking a course in business or marketing can help you stand out online and succeed.
- **Career and CV writing** – If you need assistance applying for roles or writing your CV, courses exist to help in these areas.

Other opportunities for medical writers worldwide

There are many options for medical writers to develop their skills aside from online and in-person learning. Here are some options to consider:

- **Mentorships** – Many experienced medical writers offer private mentorships for free or a small fee, and organisations like AMWA offer mentorship programmes connecting novice writers with experienced professionals.
- **On-the-job training** – Some agencies and medical companies offer mentorships and on-the-job training for entry-level medical writers; you can search for these opportunities on LinkedIn or a website such as Monster or Indeed.
- **Pitching and publishing** – Writing and submitting articles to journals, magazines, and websites helps you practice writing, gain recognition, and enhance your experience.
- **Volunteering** – Writing or editing for medical-related nonprofits and NGOs gives you practical experience and community service.
- **Peer-review opportunities** – Engaging in peer reviews for journals or conferences offers experience and skill development in scientific writing.
- **Region-specific opportunities and variations**

While the core competencies for medical writers are universal, training opportunities vary across regions. For instance, the US emphasises practical, industry-focused training, while European programmes often incorporate a stronger academic foundation. Asia-Pacific countries are witnessing a surge in medical writing roles, leading to increased training initiatives.

North America

For medical writers in North America, the path to professional growth is paved with opportunities, from broad-based programmes to specialised certifications. Here are some of the prominent training and professional development courses available.

For early-career medical writers, the AMWA remains the core of the learning ecosystem. Its *Essential Skills* certificate programme provides a solid foundation covering the fundamentals of medical writing, while the new *Health Communication Curriculum* addresses principles of health communication, ethical considerations when creating health content, and more. AMWA's *Medical Writer Certified* (MWC) credential, available to professionals with at least two years of medical writing experience, has become a respected industry-standard credential. For established medical writers, advanced workshops at the annual conference and online courses focus on more specialised topics such as regulatory writing, freelance business building, and statistics.

University-based certificate programmes have gained popularity for those seeking structured learning pathways. The University of California San Diego Extension and the University of Chicago offer comprehensive medical writing certificates, blending online and in-person instruction to accommodate working professionals. These programmes are designed for professionals with advanced biomedical and life

science degrees looking for careers outside academia and cover relevant topics such as writing to support regulatory documents, research grant proposals, and submissions to peer-reviewed journals, as well as ethical considerations in writing and editing. In 2024, the University of Chicago added a Professional Certificate in Healthcare Communication, which includes courses on medical copywriting, patient

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education, and continuing education for health professionals.

Online platforms (e.g., Coursera and Udemy) have expanded access to both foundational courses (like *Understanding Medical Research: Your Facebook Friend is Wrong*, Yale University; and *Writing in the Sciences*, Stanford University) and specialist courses that allow writers to deepen their understanding of complex subjects, such as clinical trial design and pharmacology. Many foundational courses or coaching opportunities also now exist to help healthcare professionals, scientists, and science graduate students transition into freelance medical writing, such as *The 6-Week Course* offered by Emma Hitt Nichols or coaching with Prosperology.

For medical writers seeking more specialised professional development options, the University of Washington offers *Specialization in Regulatory Medical Writing*, while the Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society and the Center for Professional Innovation and Education offer courses on how to write specific regulatory documents. Similarly, the *International Society for Medical Publication Professionals* develops courses on copyright and other topics for publication writers. In continuing medical education (CME), Write Medicine provides hands-on training in

CME content development through courses and a membership. The Medical Copywriting Programme guides writers who are interested in pharmaceutical advertising and healthcare professional marketing.

Australia and New Zealand

Australia and New Zealand are two countries with relatively small populations but a large medical writing network! In Australia, medical writing training options include various resources and programmes. The best place to start is the Australasian Medical Writers Association who run an annual conference, host regular networking events, and share online training options for medical writers.

The Australian Writers' Centre offers online and in-person courses with a general focus but these are extremely useful for medical writers who want to hone their writing, editing, and journalism skills.

Some universities provide relevant postgraduate courses and units. The University of Sydney provides courses and units in medical

writing as part of its postgraduate programmes. The University of Queensland offers relevant courses through its biomedical and health sciences programmes.

Online platforms such as Health Writer Hub and Coursera offer tailored courses accessible from Australia, covering health and medical writing.

China

In China, there are no formal education programmes or degrees specifically for medical writing, whether at universities or non-profit medical writing related institutions.^{1,2} Many writers rely on the hiring company's Standard Operating Procedures, Work Instructions, and/or document-specific templates (e.g., Clinical Trial Protocol and Reports) that conform to The International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH)

guidelines. Additionally, writers also refer to past examples of relevant documents as "reference materials" to guide them as they begin their writing careers. Some companies offer on-the-job

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shadowing and/or coaching programmes where junior medical writers are paired with more experienced senior writers.

In rare instances, medical writers are given the opportunity to participate in education programmes offered by AMWA, EMWA, and the International Society of Medical Publication Professionals (ISMPP), which are organisations that offer professional training for medical writers. In addition, the Chinese Medical Writers Community (CMWC) provides a platform for Chinese medical writers to meet and share knowledge through its annual conference. Furthermore, medical-related conferences in China, such as the Chinese Medical Affairs Conference and DIA, now include topics related to medical writing, providing writers with opportunities for exchange and discussion.

In China, medical writers face several challenges, including a lack of systematic and standardised training programmes, unclear career development paths, and challenges in cross-cultural communication.

Additionally, as the majority of the content in Clinical Trial Reports for the China Sub-population (subgroup analysis reports) is derived from global clinical trial reports, there is limited room for medical writers in China to grow. However, with an increasing number of local pharmaceutical companies in China aiming to, or

already, registering their drugs globally and needing to write reports in English following ICH guidelines, the market presents both challenges and opportunities for medical writers' career development. Thus, there is a growing need for targeted training and development opportunities for medical writers in the region. Tailored training and development programmes, such as online courses offered by organisations like AMWA, EMWA, or ISMPP, with friendly time zones, can help medical writers in China and elsewhere in the APAC region acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in this rapidly evolving field.

One of the best ways to find a suitable training and development opportunity is to ask around!

Moreover, with advancements in generative AI, medical writers can train themselves to become "prompt writers", specialising in creating instructions for generative AI to draft parts of Clinical Trial Reports and Clinical Trial Protocols. This allows medical writers to harness AI capabilities to expedite the document writing process while ensuring content accuracy and consistency. However, this also necessitates medical writers to continually upgrade their digital skills and AI application abilities to adapt to this evolving professional landscape.

Europe

In Europe and beyond, the EMWA Professional Development Programme (EPDP) provides training for medical writers through workshops and homework assignments. All workshops are approved by EMWA's Professional Development Committee (EPDC) and taught by leaders with hands-on expertise. These workshops are offered during the Spring (in-person) and Autumn (virtual) conferences every year.

There are about 120 different workshops in the EPDP programme at two levels of competency (foundation and advanced), covering subjects that span all areas of medical writing (regulatory writing, drug development, medical communications, and medical devices) as well as related topics such as statistics, health economics, soft skills, and cross-cultural communications. Workshop participants are eligible for EPDP credits and a certain number of credits qualifies for a Medical Writing Certificate.

In addition, the EPDC organises Expert Discussion Groups (EDGs) during Spring conferences and webinars all year round. EDGs are discussion groups designed more for expert writers and are focused on specific and advanced topics.

Peer recommendations

One of the best ways to find a suitable training and development opportunity is to ask around! We asked our LinkedIn networks about what had been instrumental in helping them succeed and here is a summary of the most popular responses:

1. **Seek reputable courses:** Look for courses from established institutions and professionals, or medical writing programmes from recognised schools. These often provide practical, high-quality training.
2. **Utilise free resources:** Take advantage of free courses and resources when available. For example, Stanford's "Writing in the Sciences" offers valuable insights and practice opportunities at no cost.
3. **Enhance your marketing skills:** Expand your knowledge on the business side of medical writing with resources from experts in marketing and copywriting.
4. **Seek guidance from experts:** Engage with mentors or advisors who specialise in areas relevant to your needs, such as those focusing on helping non-native English writers or scientific writing.
5. **Leverage podcasts and additional resources:** Listen to podcasts and use other educational materials to stay informed and

improve your skills. Resources on plain language and specific writing techniques can be particularly beneficial.

6. **Read influential books:** Enhance your understanding of medical writing by reading influential books, such as Trisha Greenhalgh's *How to Read a Paper*,³ for deeper insights into research and writing.

Conclusion

Engaging in professional development opportunities is crucial for medical writers to maintain and enhance their skills, stay abreast of industry trends, and advance their careers. By defining career goals and then participating in certifications, courses, workshops, conferences, and other development activities, medical writers can achieve continuous growth and success in their profession.

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Disclaimers

The opinions expressed in this article are the authors' own and not necessarily shared by their employers or EMWA. The information provided here is intended as a small sample or subset of the broader range of training options or knowledge available. This list is not exhaustive and may not encompass all possibilities or details. The reader is encouraged to seek additional information and resources to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Disclosures and conflicts of interest

Michelle Guillemard is the founder of Health Writer Hub, an online health writing course provider. This affiliation is disclosed to provide context regarding the author's expertise and background. Alexandra Howson, PhD, CHCP, hosts the Write Medicine podcast and runs WriteCME Pro, a professional development membership for medical writers ready to specialise in CME. This affiliation provides context regarding the author's expertise and background. Ann Zhang, a medical writer at IQVIA, incorporated China-related content based on its topical relevance, without any external influences, affiliations, or undisclosed conflicts of interest.

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Alexandra Howson, PhD, CHCP, hosts the Write Medicine podcast and runs WriteCME Pro, a professional development membership for medical writers ready to specialise in CME. Her new book, *WriteCME Roadmap: How to Thrive in CME with No Experience, No Network, and No Clue* (Tilt Publishing) is available now.



Ann Zhang has been working as a Medical Writer at IQVIA, working under an outsourcing agreement with Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS), since 2021. In this role, her primary responsibility is to write regulatory and clinical documents, such as briefing books, clinical overviews, protocols, and Clinical Study Reports, for various submissions within the R & D department. Additionally, she leads her team's document quality control process and has recently embarked on prompt writing, leveraging generative AI to enhance document quality and expedite initial draft creation.